

Reading Comprehension Questions:
“The Devil and Tom Walker”

1. What is the setting for this story?
2. What is supposed to be hidden under one of the big trees beside the inlet? Why is that a good hiding place?
3. What happened to the person who hid it there? Who supposedly watches over the money?
4. What bad trait do both Tom Walker and his wife have? How is this trait shown in the way they collect eggs?
5. What evidence is there that Tom and his wife are always fighting?
6. Why does Tom walk through the swamp on the way home one day? Why does the author say it was an “ill-chosen route”?
7. Where does Tom pause to rest? Why would most people not have stopped there?
8. What does Tom discover in the ground at his feet? What happens when he kicks it?
9. What two things surprise Tom about the figure seated on the stump of the tree?
10. Why does the devil say that Deacon Peabody will be damned? What else do we learn Deacon Peabody has done which might be seen as a sin?
11. What does the tree with Deacon Peabody’s name on it show about him? (How is it used as a symbol of his character?)
12. After the devil cuts down a tree, what does he do with it? What is that a symbol of?
13. What sorts of activities does the devil describe himself doing? What do those activities show about him?
14. What would most people’s reaction have been to meeting this stranger? Why doesn’t Tom react this way?
15. What does the devil offer Tom? What does the devil want in exchange?
16. What proof does the devil give Tom that what he has said is true? What does his

wife tell him that convinces Tom that “all he had heard and seen was no illusion” (p.105)?

17. When his wife hears Tom’s story, what is her reaction? How does this change Tom’s attitude?
18. What happens in Tom’s wife’s first encounter with the devil? What does she take the second time?
19. What does Tom see up in a tree when he is looking for his wife? What is his reaction? Why?
20. What different clues does Tom find of what happened to his wife?
21. How does Tom feel about the devil after this incident?
22. How does the devil play hard to get ? How is that different from the image generally presented of how the devil operates?
23. What different ideas does the devil suggest for how the money should be used? What is Tom’s response to each?
24. Why is it a particularly good time for Tom to undertake his new career?
25. How does Tom become rich? How does he spend his money? What shows he is still a miser?
26. When he gets old, what different things does he do to avoid keeping his end of the bargain he had made with the devil?
27. What favor does a customer ask on Tom’s last day of life? Why does he think Tom might grant it?
28. What is Tom’s response to this customer’s request? What happens immediately after? Why?
29. What is the last anyone sees of Tom?
30. What has happened to Tom’s wealth by the end of the story?